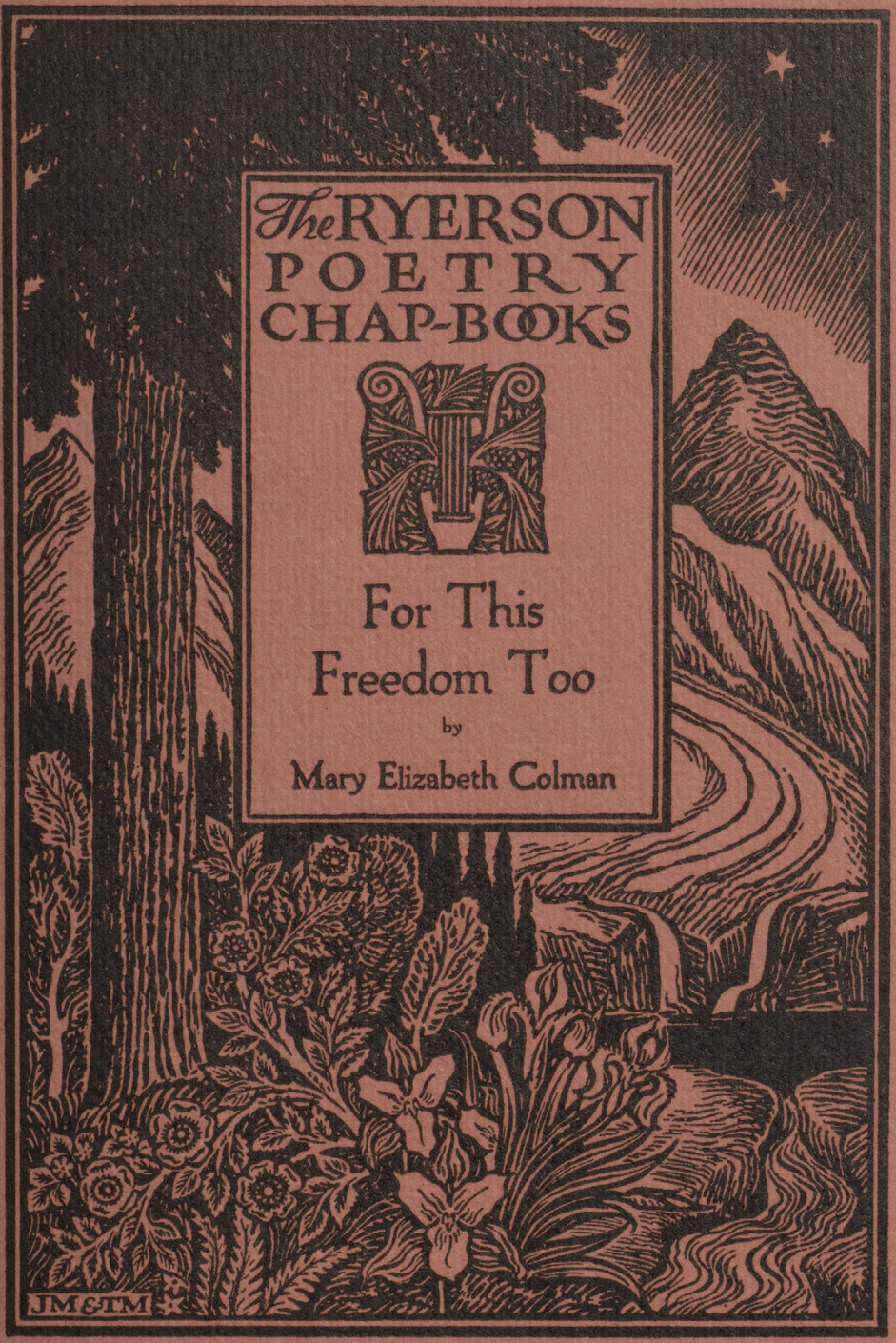

The RYERSON
POETRY
CHAP-BOOKS
For This
Freedom Too
by
Mary Elizabeth Colman
JM&TM

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TO THE MEMORY OF
MY VERY DEAR FRIEND
ANNIE CHARLOTTE DALTON, M.B.E.

Mary Elizabeth Colman was born in Victoria, B.C., of mingled English and French descent. She received her education at the Central Collegiate, Winnipeg, Man., at the College de Rolle, Switzerland, and at the University of British Columbia. She now lives in Vancouver and contributes short stories, poems and articles to various periodicals. Her work, whether in fiction or poetry, is marked throughout by an alert and broad sympathy, especially towards childhood and towards those "strangers within our gates," of which her previous Chap-Book, entitled *The Immigrants*, mainly treats.

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The Ryerson Poetry Chapbooks

For This Freedom Too

By Mary Elizabeth Colman

"A professor of the University of Leyden has been sent to a concentration camp for protesting the dismissal of a Jewish colleague."—Premier of Holland over B. B. C.

"I HAD no choice, Mertta, for I am too old
to fight with corporeal arms.

Freedom is such a precious thing.
There is no other good I hold so dear,
nor would you have it any other wise.

Freedom to investigate, to live in peace
and to enjoy the fruits of science and of toil;
freedom to meet my friends, free discussion,
criticism; freedom in short
to live as it becomes a man:
these freedoms of the flesh are stars
in the night that is our life.

But there may come to any man
in this travail of the world
that brings to birth in blood a better way of life
a time when he must choose
between such tatters of these freedoms
as transient tyrants may allow
and eternal freedom's very self:
such was the choice I had to make.

Mueller was no friend to me. Indeed
it might be said he was my enemy,
certainly I never had an other.
And yet if I had held my peace,
been silent, nor protested
his dismissal on such a pretext now
then indeed had I lost the root and essence
of all true liberty.

Dismissed because he is a Jew!
Monstrous premise, that once admitted
must prove the first death pang
of every freedom everywhere.

But I have spoken, Mertta,
have protested; so good-bye.
Tell my sons my testament:
that for this freedom too,
as for the freedom of the flesh,
a man may choose to die."

THE COST

IT was a shabby house, lacking grace or dignity.
The professor's wife herself
opened the door, her dear remembered face
chiselled by destiny, a mask of fortitude.
We sat in a room bare and clean:
a deal table strewn with papers,
books on a home-made shelf
marked it the professor's study.
"Do you remember me, Madame?
You were very kind to me, years ago
when I was a student in Vienna.
Often I sat in the professor's study
drinking coffee, listening to his brilliant talk."

. . . . .

Professor Hartmann, eminent biologist,
was a great man in our student world,
his book-lined room a paradise, and Madame
the angel of our dreams. Pictures on the wall,
a cabinet of ivories, deep cushioned chairs,

a leaping fire, coffee in thin china cups,
and little Karl passing the heaping tray
of pastries with solemn and joyful mien;
the professor in brown velvet smoking coat
and tasselled skull-cap, fine cigar in hand
dominated the scene, illuminating with a word,
elucidating with a phrase, and always ending,
"The truth, gentlemen, whatever the cost, always—the truth!"
There was a weekly pfennig sweep
on the exact minute he would say it—
Madame at least must have noticed
how all eyes turned to the great gilt clock.

. . . . .

"So you were one of those? My husband
will be glad to see you." A small
flame of animation lit her voice. "Have you heard
what happened?" "No, Madame."
She spoke without emotion:
"It was required of the faculty to teach
that German blood was of a different composition—
chemically different, you understand—
therefore the German biologically superior,
'herrenvolk'—a master race.
Professor Hartmann of course resigned."
" 'The truth, gentlemen, whatever the cost, always—the truth,' "
I murmured. "You have not forgotten?"
A brief smile flickered across her face.
"You lads had a wager on his saying that,
had you not?" "You knew?" "Of course.
But who could dream what the cost would be?
We were warned one day by a strange young man
who whispered to us as we walked in the park.
We dare not return to our house, but hid by day
and walked by night—and so escaped."
After a silence I ventured, "Your son?"
His mother's face was grey.
It flashed on me he might be dead,
or in a concentration camp. . . .
In brittle tones she said,
"His name may not be spoken in this house.
He is high in the councils of the Party."
Her hand touched my arm,
light and dry as an autumn leaf,
her eyes pleaded for belief, "I think

that it was he who sent to warn us.
Don't you think it was Karl
who sent the strange young man?
You remember how affectionate he was,
how gentle, and how kind?"

"I remember, dear Madame," I said,
But I thought, "I wish he were dead,
I wish he were dead."

HUNGER

BEFORE that death had stained the land,
Before that wrath had raised a bloody hand,
Hunger was there.

When the patient hills were young,
When first the earth into her orbit swung,
Hunger was there.

Urging down an unknown road,
The beckoning hand, the scourge, the lash, the goad,
Hunger was there.

* * *

Trudging heavily, stepping high and delicately,
Dancing with sun-dazzled eyes,
Groping with outstretched pallid hands,
Foot before foot, arms hanging limp,
Nodding head and empty look,
Stamp, tramp, dusty dogged feet,
Star-filled eyes and weary tread,
Mud, blood, mutter, moan,
Through hope to the far side despair—
Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor,
Rich man, poor man,
Beggar-man, thief.
The tinker was a saint in Bedford goal,
A rogue upon a Cornish road;
At Pompeii the tailor died,
And once upon a Spanish barricade;
The soldier followed Alexander, Napoleon and Foch;

The sailor ventured in his coracle,
He piloted the *Normandie;*
The rich man donned his Tyrian robe,
Tapped his snuff-box with scented finger
And taxied to a perfect three-point landing;
The poor man pawned his coat in Claudius' Rome,
His father's watch in Montreal;
The beggar showed his sores in Xanadu
And chewed a cake of soap at Croyden yesterday;
The thief who fled from Ghengis Khan
The corner cop pursues him still—
Wise all; fools all;
Mist of morning, meadow grass;
Long remember, soon forget;
Ceaseless pageant; journey brief—
But these remain:
Love, death and hunger;
And love may conquer death,
But hunger stalks unsatisfied.

* * *

With what sustaining bread these multitudes
Be daily fed?
With bubbles fair, with bubbles, pretty bubbles
In the air.

When is the reckoning made, and in what coin
Shall it be paid?
Account rendered; payment on demand
Must be tendered

In bloody sweat, in agony, in death.
Such incurred debt
To be duly paid in full, nor any least
Remission made.

* * *

My candle gives a faltering light,
I would be silent,
Still as a tree on a windless night—
The blast blows high,
There is no shelter from the storm.

Speak, speak!
My tongue is halt . . .

Let it but stammer truth.
  My voice is small . . .
See then its words be clear.
  No man will heed . . .
Speak, speak!

My candle gives a fitful light—
Only the dead are still,
Still as stones on a windy night—
The blast blows high
And none may shelter from the storm.

* * *

Out of the furnace came forth a god
Taming the lightning
With piston and cam-wheel, with lever and rod,
Enslaving the seas,
Snaring the stars with invisible net,
Teaching the wind
His will, harnessing forces yet
Of the twilight zone.
Confounding time, destroying space,
Raising aloft
Impious fingers of steel that race
The peaks to heaven.

We cried,
"This is our god
And none other;
Here is the end
Of our quest,
Bread for our hunger."

The god of the furnace rose in his might:
The sun-filled day
Was drowned in dark and foul-mouthed night.
He laughed,
And the dreadful sound of his mocking mirth
Girdled the seas,
Startled the stars and encircled the earth.
It echoed in factory,
Farm and mine, each fearful peal
A fresh forged link
Of the devil's chain of gold and steel
We hug so close.

The bubble has burst—
Our fettered hands
Are full of emptiness;
Our debt of blood and tears,
Unredeemed,
Must still be paid in full.

Pushing a lever there and back
Day after day;
Lifting tins to a moving rack
Week after week;
Securing a bolt or turning a wheel
Over and back,
Throwing a shuttle or winding a reel
'Round and 'round;
Noise and smoke, heat and glare—
Heed not, halt not,
Robots with vacant stare
Chained to the task.

How long,
How long endure?
Hate simmers in the pot,
Nor hunger feeds
But red despair.

* * *

High priests of the new Baalim
Measure the orbit
Of neutrons and electrons in the atom,
Predict with precision
The effect of their union
Or sudden disintegration,
Release their primal energy
Potent to create or to destroy;
Prying microscopes reveal
The last secrets of blood and brain,
Life itself is stretched
On the dissecting table
While the scalpel anatomizes
The processes of love.
Acolytes at altars of glass and steel
Offer life in a test-tube,
Death in a retort.
The boundaries of the universe expand,

No ultimate mystery inviolate:
The course of the remotest star
Is accurately plotted,
Its elements known
And neatly tabulated,
Biology firmly disposes
Of the Almighty,
And psychology explains away sin.
Passion and pity, delight and desire
Are automatic responses
To complex stimuli
Supplied by internal secretions
Of the ductless glands.
There is nothing in love or life
From seduction by a moron
To the genius of Einstein or Eliot
But may be expressed
In terms of a chemical reaction
Or adequately elucidated
With the aid of a mathematical formula.

* * *

Come, seek our sister without delay;
Surrender virginity
To the cool intimacy
Of her embrace.
In the fine privacy
Of her sun-forgotten house
Sits a sailor
Waiting to pledge
Each new come guest
In a glass filled
From the deep still brook
That flows by the door.
Bread seeker, here is no bread
For your hunger,
But the kiss of our sister
And a long cool draught
Drawn from the still brook
That flows by her door.

* * *

To the palace of peace the greybeards come
Drawn by a dream,
(Mute the trumpets; muffle the drum)

A vision of splendour:
Shoulder to shoulder all men stood
And with a shout
Of joy proclaimed their brotherhood.
The weak were bold,
The strong content, and no demand
That justice must
Refuse was made, nor any hand
In anger raised.

To the palace of peace the young men come
Drawn by the dream,
(Mute the trumpets; muffle the drum)
Hate forsworn and all hearts pure
Hope rides high:
The dream is truth, it shall endure,
And strength released
Shall now prevail to right the wrong,
Rescue distress
And conquer want that ages long
Has plagued mankind.

To the ivory tower the old men come
Dreaming still;
(Mute the trumpets, muffle the drum)
All bewitched
To the ivory tower youth ascends
With virtuous haste;
And so, with good victorious ends
The fairy tale:
A stroke of the pen and greed is dead,
A wave of the wand
And every cause for war is fled—
Millennium here!

A bubble, a bubble,
A pretty bubble
In the air,
Quite the finest bubble
At the fair!
Such a pity it should break,
And who could tell
That it would make
Such a stench?

* * *

The man of might appears,
Beating a brazen drum,
And purged of thought
The multitude keep step.
The amorphous mob,
Pied drummer in the van,
Are moulded by the insistent beat
Into a vast machine.
Rank on rank in serried mass
Ten thousand move as one—
If any hear a different drum
Only his blood can purge
The unnatural offence.
Arm the black-shirt babes!
Drill the brown-shirt lads!
The race is to the swift,
The battle to the strong!
Let our fecund women breed us men
Docile and strong
That never our fertile fields may lack
The passionate orchids of death.
Sing of battle!
Sing of blood!
Let armoured tanks talk of peace
While grey terrible birds
Lay poisoned eggs
That the primitive brother
May taste the beauties and benefits
Of civilization.

Hate like molten lava
Sears the plain;
Fields that fed the world
Are barren and bare
And every bird is slain or fled;
Security is a plate balanced
Upon a juggler's nose
While wilful children use his back
As a target for their balls.
And have we come so far
And struggled from the slime
To emulate the ants,

Surrender every thought,
Procreate in platoons,
And owe our mere survival
To a megalomaniac's whim?

Bubbles, only bubbles
In the air;
They burst so soon
And still must be paid for—
Nor is any rebate allowed
The disappointed customer.

* * *

And can your blowing, little man,
Put out the sun?
Are you a super-Sampson-Hercules
Who with bare arms
Will circle round the ancient pillars of the world
And bring them crashing down
That you may bear the universe
Upon your own unaided back?

* * *

Bitter men slouching idly by—
(Where gleaming doors flung hospitably wide
Admit some paunchy, full-fed little man
And loose upon the frosty aid a cloud
Of fragrant steam that taunts
The appetite)—
to fit their shabby limbs
And concave stomachs to a greasy board
And order beans . . .
Children sleeping cold . . .
Women standing patiently to change
City relief tokens "Good for food
And fuel only" at a department store
Where treasures from the ports of incredible seas
Are heaped, and meretricious baubles woo
The anaemic purse and beauty loving eye . . .
Threadbare old men and sullen, lusty youths
Hands in pockets lounging down the street
Despair or futile rage dulling the minds
That disciplined by knowledge of their worth

And power might change the present hopeless course
Of dull disaster.
Oh dim deserving fools!
The teeming earth supplies plenty for all
If but the measure of necessity
Decide each share in equity. The world
Is yours; how long then will you suffer greed
To rob you of your rightful heritage?

The Proletarian State provides that each
Into the common store shall give his best,
And draw but to supply his present need.
Common toil for common good shall thus
Alike remove the prick of poverty
And itch for wealth: the impetus of greed.
The government shall be by popular choice
And each elected one in wisdom rule
His comrades.
Incorruptible, no lust
For power, hope of preferment or reward
Shall move his mind, but god-like understanding
And human sympathy.
Relieved from fear
Of want, and nurtured in security
The crooked spirit shall grow straight and strong;
A race of men be bred whose pride
Shall be in beauty, sex and every art
And craft of peace that fruitful minds can bring
To ripe perfection in a golden age.

* * *

Comrades, raise the ruddy flag!
Give scarifying hate
Full freedom to destroy!
Then from the ruins purged of God
The proletariat shall rise
To usher in an age of gold.
Liquidate all who oppose!
Canalize the will of the workers
And integrate the mighty Proletarian State!

Blind sons of Esau who follow the dead
Seeking the abundant life,
Blood red bubbles burst at length,

Fly they never so near the sun—
Proletarian, what now? The impotent dead
Have only the grave to share.

* * *

Hearts faint and fail for fear beside
The sea
Whose unrelenting terror-tide
Upfloods
Shore, rocks, every seeming-safe
Retreat.
Silently the first thin wave
Presage
Of jeopardy, with chill white hand
Outstretched
Touches the yet warm sands
We know.

Earth shudders at the nearing tread
Of doom,
Threatened disaster and the dread
Unknown;
Apocalyptic horsemen ride
Abroad,
Vials of terror and swords at their side.
Away!
Flee to the mountains and call on the hills
To fall—
Grain fine-ground at last, the mills
Are still.

* * *

Is there no answer then?
And must the hungry hordes
Hurtling through these starry wastes
One brief bright instant
Drop to darkness
Still unsatisfied?
Shall groping hands
Pallid with dismay
Grasp bubbles, only bubbles
World without end?

Since our first parents
Sold their innocence for sapience—
Payment in advance for goods

Still undelivered—
Wisdom has eluded us.
Only the child-like dare
To walk by faith,
Only the simple hearted
Take the Almighty at His word.

Divine temerity that would restore
The leadership of states
To God!
Sublime audacity
That would outreach the stars,
Assault the gates of Paradise,
Batter the very doors of Heaven,
Nor lay down arms, nor rest,
Nor give Him any rest
Until He grant us our demands—
Restore the ravished earth.
And claim its kingdoms for His own
World without end!

WE MEN ARE OF TWO WORLDS

WE men are of two worlds.
In craft frail as chambered nautilus
we come, solitary, minute,
propelled by waves that had their genesis
on shores so far beyond our knowing
that they have never dwelt in memory.
And when we reach these coasts—
inhospitable sands we never asked to see,
strewn with many a bleaching bone
and horrid skull,
where greedy fingers of the foam
advance, retreat, advance,
with promise ever unfulfilled—
forgetful whence we came
we plunge into the jungle.

. . . . .

A high standard of living:
a second car, you owe it to yourself,
a permanent for little Lou,
the best sorority for sister Sue,

a racoon coat for brother,
mink and silver fox for mother,
the country club for dad, and golf . . .

The Japanese invade Manchuria,
but Manchuria's far away.

Better wages, shorter hours;
the world owes us a living
and a good one too!
Swing the music hot and sweet
to the rhythm of dancing feet,
days are born to give us pleasure
nights are added for good measure . . .

The Abyssinian sky is dark
with wingèd death.

Smiles are cheap and win new friends,
use flattery to influence the great;
learn to play the piano—ten easy lessons,
or be an artist in six pleasant sessions;
twenty shades of polish for your finger tips
choose a tone to match the colour of your lips . . .

Rehearsal for world war is called in Spain,
insatiate the Nazi vampire feasts on blood.

What I can make is mine,
my cunning and my cleverness
have earned my right
to better things.
Lebensraum!
What I can take is mine!
My arm is strong; by right of might
make way, all lesser men, for herrenvolk!
. . . . .
Deep in the jungle
we have forgotten whence we came
until some day at dawn perhaps,
at some street end where factories
lift blackened hands to heaven,
or in some field where autumn sun
tearing through the curtain of the rain
touches with gold and purple tenderness

some leaf forsaken tree,
there comes a moment of awareness,
of sudden recollection.
We stand upon a hill, facing the sea
and hear its cadence with delight.
Then with puzzled headshake
all is gone. There is just a factory
with black chimney stacks,
a naked tree, cold autumn rain.

Yet, seek we the hill top and we shall find,
ears open to its call shall hear again
the ocean's never silent call;
and hearing turn towards the sound,
and seeing march towards the sea
where salty winds, clean and free,
greet us from that far country whence we came.

We men are of two worlds—
how great the cost of our forgetting!
Turn, turn, have done with fear
and greed, and selfish seeking;
so shall we win to peace at last
and only so, and so to victory;
dwell in this our pleasant land
yet live in vibrant harmony
with that other, unseen world,
our spirit's home.

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Lorne Pierce—Editor

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